

# Episodic Disabilities Network (EDN) Statement of Common Agenda on Episodic Disability, Full Participation & Employment

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With advances in medical technologies, Canadians are living longer. However, more and more Canadians are also living with lifelong episodic disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

The Government of Canada response to the 2003 report *Listening to Canadians: A First View of the Canada Pension Plan Disability Program*, states, “Recurrent and episodic disabilities are becoming more prevalent in Canadian society.”

## Did you know?

20 percent of all Canadians will experience an episode of mental illness in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>  
55,000 to 75,000 Canadians have multiple sclerosis<sup>3</sup>  
65,000 Canadians are living with HIV<sup>4</sup>  
Over four million Canadians are affected by arthritis<sup>5</sup>  
16% of all women are disabled and overall women have a higher rate of episodic illness than men<sup>5</sup>

**The combined impact is staggering.**

Because it is often difficult to predict when episodes of disability will occur, how severe they will be and how long they will last, some people must leave the workforce without warning for indeterminate lengths of time, resulting in serious impacts on health, employment participation, income stability, coordination of care and social inclusion.

There are also many systemic and practical barriers that prevent people with episodic disabilities from participating in the labour force, in communities and in society in a meaningful way.

***Adequate income is an integral part of full participation in Canadian society.*** Many people with episodic disabilities rely on federal, provincial and private income support programs when they are unable to participate fully in the workforce. However, certain aspects of these programs act as disincentives to labour force participation.

The experience of many people living with disabilities is that while disability income support programs are necessary, many programs trap them in poverty by creating barriers to staying on the job or returning to work. For people living with episodic disabilities who have periods when they are able to work, this is especially true.

Ensuring that Canadians living with episodic disabilities are able to participate in the labour force to their full ability results in many ***financial and social benefits.***

## Financial and social benefits include:

- Facilitating greater independence, social inclusion and satisfaction
- Reducing the need for full disability benefits for some people
- Contributing to the economy through Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan and other contributions
- Contributing many skills to the labour force
- Addressing the potential skilled labour shortage that will result from the future demographic shift when a large number of Canadians retire

## The Way Forward:

The interjurisdictional complexities of these issues require the participation of all sectors to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to promote the financial independence and social inclusion of people with episodic disabilities. **A critical first step includes:**

Convening a national policy dialogue by the federal government to explore:

- Developing a body (e.g. commission, ministry, department or level of government) to oversee and report on the coordination between eight disability support programs and five service areas<sup>6</sup> and establish options for people with episodic disabilities within disability benefit programs. Although taken individually each program or service area may work well, the system as a whole is hard to access and does not work for persons with episodic disabilities.
- Developing a program or combination of programs that provides partial disability income support to complement earned income from part-time work for people with episodic disabilities who have a partial capacity to work.
- Make Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits more flexible to allow people to work part-time and/or intermittently and receive partial sickness benefits for up to 150 half-days as needed, instead of the current 15 consecutive weeks or 75 full-days.

On behalf of the millions of Canadians living with episodic disabilities, we call upon the federal, provincial and territorial governments, employers, private insurance companies and other key stakeholders to collaborate with each other and with people living with episodic disabilities to bring about reform. We are asking for different not more. ***It is time to reform both public and private disability income support and replacement programs to meet the needs and aspirations of people living with episodic disabilities.***

Signed,

### Organizations of the EDN:

- Arthritis Community Research & Evaluation Unit (ACREU)
- Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation (CWGHR)
- Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA)
- DAWN-RAFH Canada
- Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada
- Mood Disorders Society of Canada
- National Network for Mental Health
- The Arthritis Society

### For more information, contact:

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1. An episodic disabling condition or disease is lifelong, but unlike permanent or progressive disabling conditions, results in episodes of disability. The periods of disability can vary in severity and duration. There may be advance warning or the episode may come on unexpectedly. Examples include mental illness, arthritis, asthma, HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis, and some forms of cancer and rare diseases.

2. Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC): [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/mi-mm/mi\\_figures-mm\\_figures-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/mi-mm/mi_figures-mm_figures-eng.php)

3. PHAC: [http://www.mssociety.ca/en/involved/advocacy/socact\\_brief\\_fin2010PreBudgetConsult\\_Aug09.htm](http://www.mssociety.ca/en/involved/advocacy/socact_brief_fin2010PreBudgetConsult_Aug09.htm)

4. PHAC: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/publication/surreport/estimato8-eng.php>

5. PHAC: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/musculo/arthritis-arthrite-eng.php>; and <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-628-x/89-628-x2007003-eng.pdf>

6. The eight income programs are: Canada Pension Plan disability (CPP-D), Employment Insurance Sickness (EI sickness), Veterans' Benefits for Disability, Disability Tax Credits, Personal/Family Resources Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) (referring to this as a program for purposes of discussion); provincial social assistance for disability, Workers' Compensation, Employers' Long Term Income Protection (LTIP). The five service areas are: Disability Supports, Caregiver supports, Employment and Training, Social Services and Medical Services.